

## Romans 12 (1-13-11)

## THE SELF-ESTEEM SWINDLE

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your **reasonable** service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of **your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, **not to think of himself more highly** than he ought to think; **but to think soberly**, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...

This study tonight will "set the stage" for our morning sermon this coming Lord's Day. We must turn from worldly "thinking" if we will understand the true will of God for our lives. One of the main attributes of worldliness is a lack of sobriety, which manifests itself in drunken foolishness, sarcasm, and arrogance/self-importance. This is why verse 3 begins with the word "for." We must *prepare* ourselves, by *presenting* ourselves. And part of our preparation to hear and know the will of God involves renewing our minds so that we are not *worldly* in our thinking. We must not be drunk with selfishness and immaturity. We must *think soberly*. And this involves humility - not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. We are not to be conformed to the world in our manner of thinking. And what is the way of the world?:

**1 John 2:16** For all that is **in the world**, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and **the pride of life**, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

**Psalms 73:6** Therefore **pride compasseth them about** as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.

12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper **in the world**; they increase in riches.

18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

**Psalms 10:4** The wicked, through **the pride of his countenance**, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

**Obadiah 1:3** The **pride** of thine heart hath **deceived** thee...

Pride is the opposite of sobriety:

**Habakkuk 2:5** Yea also, **because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man**, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell...

**Proverbs 23:31** Look not thou upon the wine...

33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and **thine heart shall utter perverse things.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:6** Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but **let us watch and be sober.**  
7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and **they that be drunken** are drunken in the night.

**1 Peter 1:13** Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, **be sober...**

**1 Peter 4:7** But the end of all things is at hand: **be ye therefore sober,** and watch unto prayer.

**1 Peter 5:8** **Be sober,** be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

To grow in the will of God, we must renew our minds and think soberly, with humility; otherwise, we will end up in greater sin and destruction - not understanding the will of God:

**Proverbs 18:12** Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, **not to think of himself more highly** than he ought to think; **but to think soberly,** according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

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Verse 4 uses the analogy of our own physical body to show us some truths concerning the church body. The hand has its place. The eye has its place:

**1 Corinthians 12:21** And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

In our deluded sense of self-importance, we can forget our need of others:

"All men are prone to overvalue themselves; and therefore to each of them Paul thus pointedly brings home the exhortation."

(Haldane, *Romans*, 1853)

**1 Corinthians 4:7** For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

**Ephesians 4:7** But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

We must think soberly. We must not demean our gifts and abilities in a *false* humility, or to justify our laziness. Many people insult themselves in order to draw forth compliments. This is not true humility. Others speak badly of themselves to *appear* humble to men. This is not true humility. Others use their supposed inabilities to excuse their slothfulness. They are like the unjust steward:

**Luke 16:3** Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: **I cannot dig**; to beg I am ashamed.

**Proverbs 21:25**...his hands **refuse** to labour.

**Proverbs 22:13** The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.

Some sluggards will not work for God, in the church, in ministries, or in any spiritual work. They have various excuses, such as *dangerous lions that will eat them*. A common excuse is their alleged inability or lack of gifts. This is not true humility:

**Proverbs 26:16** The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

Therefore, while we guard against the danger of over-rating ourselves, we must also beware of slipping into the false humility games of the sluggard. When laziness can be turned into a virtue (i.e. humility), it becomes a compelling temptation for many drowsy saints. God calls us to a holy sobriety in the estimation of ourselves, and our gifts:

"This virtue is so essential to the right state of our souls, that there is no pretending to a reasonable or pious life without it. We may as well think to see without eyes, or live without breath, as to live in the spirit of religion without the spirit of humility...No people have more occasion to be afraid of the approaches of pride, than those, who have made some advances in a pious life: for pride can grow as well upon our virtues as our vices, and steals upon us on all occasions...**Humility does not consist in having a worse opinion of ourselves than we deserve, or in abasing ourselves lower than we really are; but as all virtue is founded in truth, so humility is founded in a true and just sense of our weakness, misery, and sin. He that rightly feels and lives in this sense of his condition, lives in humility.** The weakness of our state appears from our inability to do anything as of ourselves. In our natural state we are entirely without any power; we are indeed active beings, but can only act by a power that is every moment lent us from God...Now the misery of our condition appears in this, that we use these borrowed powers of our nature to the torment and vexation of ourselves, and our fellow creatures. God Almighty has entrusted us with the use of reason, and we use it to the disorder and corruption of our nature. We reason ourselves into all kinds of folly and misery, and make our lives the sport of foolish and extravagant passions; seeking after imaginary happiness in all kinds of shapes, creating to ourselves a thousand wants, amusing our hearts with false hopes and fears, using the world worse than irrational animals, envying, vexing, and tormenting one another with restless passions, and unreasonable contentions. Let any man but look back upon his own life, and see what use he has made of his reason, how little he has consulted it, and how less he has followed it...No creature that had lived in innocence, would have thereby got any pretence for self-honour and esteem; because, as a creature, all that it is, or has, or does, is from God, and therefore the honour of all that belongs to it is only due to God. But if a creature that is a sinner, and under the displeasure of the great Governor of all the world,

and deserving nothing from Him but pains and punishments for the shameful abuse of his powers; if such a creature pretends to self-glory for anything that he is or does, he can only be said to glory in his shame. Now how monstrous and shameful the nature of sin is, is sufficiently apparent from that great Atonement, that is necessary to cleanse us from the guilt of it. Nothing less has been required to take away the guilt of our sins, than the sufferings and death of the Son of God."

(William Law, *A Serious Call*)

In light of all of this, what shall we say of the modern "self esteem" movement that so many Christians have parroted? The Holy Ghost warns us against thinking *more highly* of ourselves than we ought to think. *This* is the danger. Yet, these modern, Christian psychologists, motivational speakers, etc., tell us that the greatest problem with mankind is low self-esteem!:

"Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for self-love and self-esteem. It is a good and necessary focus."

(Bruce Narramore, *You're Someone Special*, 1978)

Christian psychologist, Dr. James Dobson, writes:

"Lack of self-esteem produces **more** symptoms of psychiatric disorders than any other fact yet identified."

(*Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions*)

"I have no doubt [that self-esteem is women's] **greatest** need."

Why doesn't the Holy Ghost, in Romans 12, exhort us to beware of this *low* self-esteem? What is the reason that *God* gives for the perils of these last days? Is it *low* self-esteem?:

**2 Timothy 3:1** This know also, that **in the last days perilous times** shall come.

2 **For men shall be lovers of their own selves**, covetous, **boasters, proud**, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

4 Traitors, **heady, highminded**, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Many, even in the world, are now awaking to the foolishness of the band-wagon that so many Christians jumped upon in recent decades:

"There is precious little evidence that self-esteem is the cause of our social ills...Those social scientists looked hard...but they could detect essentially no cause-and-effect link between self-esteem and problematic behavior, whether it's teen pregnancy, drug use or child abuse."

(David L. Kirk, *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*)

"Time and time again, experiments have revealed that people tend to attribute positive behaviors to themselves and negative behaviors to external factors...Preachers who deliver ego-boosting pep talks to audiences who are supposedly plagued with miserable self-images are preaching to a problem that seldom exists."

(David Myers, *Inflated Self*)

"There is little reason to believe self-esteem leads to academic achievement or is even necessary for academic success. It is therefore crucial to delegitimize the education establishment's mindless glorification of self-esteem. As Richard Weissbourd has written in *The Vulnerable Child: What Really Hurts America's Children and What We Can Do About Them*, schools gripped by self-esteem theory 'are, in essence, producing a generation of poorly educated adults who will lack the habits of hard work and perseverance that have historically been necessary to achieving true success'...In 1986, a group of California state legislators convinced themselves that low self-esteem was the root cause behind a variety of social and economic problems such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and poor school performance. Before taking this line of thinking too far, however, they decided they needed some research to back up their claims. So they established the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, which published its findings in a book called *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*. The editors might as well have titled it *The Social Unimportance of Self-esteem* because they found practically no connection between self-esteem and any of the behaviors they studied. As Neil Smelser noted in the introduction, 'One of the disappointing aspects of every chapter in this volume...is how low the associations between self-esteem and its consequences are in research to date.'"

(Nina H. Shokraii, *The Self-esteem Fraud: Feel-good Education Does Not Lead to Academic Success*)

"*The Self-Esteem Scam - A study suggests that 'self-esteem belongs on the same shelf as miracle diet pills'...*"  
(The Wilson Quarterly, 2005)

"*Hey, I'm Terrific! The Latest National Elixir - Self-Esteem - Is Supposed To Cure Everything From Poor Grades To Bad Management. Instead, It Gives Feeling Good A Bad Name...* now you know that there are no bad people, only people who think badly of themselves...as a paradigm for analyzing almost every problem in American society, self-esteem is clearly a product of today's relentless search for ever more fundamental and unifying laws of nature...Low self-esteem is a meta-addiction, a state that seems to underlie afflictions as diverse as bulimia and performance anxiety. 'People saw that self-esteem was a component of so many other things - teenage pregnancies, dropouts, drugs, school success - and they were hoping we'd found one solution to many problems,' says psychoanalyst Nancy E. Curry of the University of Pittsburgh. People always hope that; it's what keeps publishers going...the concept of self-esteem has established itself in almost every area of society...An outfit called High Self-Esteem Toys Corp. has brought out a fashion doll named Happy To Be Me...**Churches have discovered that 'low self-esteem' is a less off-putting phrase to congregants than 'sin'**...Toddlers are encouraged to 'reach their full potential' in self-esteem day-care centers. High-school drug and alcohol programs now emphasize self-esteem...Of course, there are still some kinks to work out. Pamela Smart the New Hampshire school teacher convicted of having her husband murdered, met her teenage lover at a 'Project Self-Esteem' workshop...The San Diego city school system voted last year to abolish failing grades...Nevertheless an outraged public rescued the 'F' before the plan could take effect...Psychologist Harold Stevenson of the University of Michigan found that American schoolchildren rank far ahead of students in Japan, Taiwan and China in self-confidence about their abilities

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in math. Unfortunately, this achievement was marred by the fact that Americans were far behind in actual performance in math. Japanese parents 'don't lavish praise on their children - they're concerned they will end up thinking too much about themselves...' A sense of self, grounded in a sense of personal competence and supported by people who think I am a valuable and worthy person, is a requisite for productive learning to occur,' says Linda Darling Hammond, a professor of education at Columbia Teachers College. That also seems intuitively obvious to most Americans today - **although 70 years ago it was equally obvious to many educators that schools had to break down children's 'sense of self,' the better to fill their heads with facts...** A recent survey of the literature estimated that more than 10,000 scientific studies of self-esteem have been conducted. Researchers have measured it with more than 200 different tests... **There isn't even agreement on what it is...** 'There's a huge self-esteem industry out there, and a lot of it is nonsense,' says Lillian Katz, president-elect of the National Association for the Education of Young Children... Norman Vincent Peale gave self-esteem (or 'positive thinking') a religious dimension... Robert H. Schuller. From the pulpit of the Crystal Cathedral, Schuller preaches an explicit gospel of self-esteem... Think of the Halsey Schools, where the word 'bad' is never spoken, where everyone gets an award every year... Ask yourself. wouldn't it be nice if life were really like this?"  
(*Newsweek*, Feb. 17, 1992, Jerry Adler)

#### Some Final Bible Verses:

**Revelation 22:12** And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man **according as his work shall be.**

**Jeremiah 6:14** They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people **slightly**, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.

15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, **neither could they blush**: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.

16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for **the old paths**, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

17 Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

**Titus 2:4** That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, **that the word of God be not blasphemed.**

6 Young men likewise exhort to be **sober minded.**

If the problems in the world, and in our churches, are caused by low self-esteem, it would mean that the Bible is the most dangerous book on earth! It teaches us to esteem everyone else *as better* than ourselves:

**Philippians 2:3** Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in **lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.**

Did Lucifer fall, and become Satan, through low self-esteem?:

**Ezekiel 28:17** Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness...

**1 Timothy 3:6** Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

"Pride of gifts is the cause why we do so little good with them to others...Pride of gifts is the cause why we receive so little good from the gifts of others...a full soul will take nothing from God, much less from man...[For example] it is not every sermon, though wholesome food...[The proud Christian] must have a choice dish...[But] the humble Christian...can feed on plain truths..."

(William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, 1862-65)